

# Rhythm practice

Nearly every aspect of practicing a string instrument is a matter of training the mind, not the muscles. There has to be a clear mental picture of how you want the music to sound, followed by instantaneous physical response. Any delay in either the command or the response causes technical mishaps. The faster the passage the faster the 'command-response' has to be.

Command-response can be sharpened dramatically by practising passages in rhythms, which is like setting the mind a series of problems to solve. The idea is to learn how to play the rhythms 1) exactly; 2) with every note clean; 3) every note in tune; and 4) *easily*. The problems of rhythm, sound and pitch that you encounter are not so much caused by the rhythms as revealed by them. Solving the problems increases your familiarity with the passage, and speed of reaction, so much that the passage becomes effortless.

Partita No. 3 (Preludio) *Bach*

Basic two-note patterns:

1 Play both rhythms starting on the first note of the passage, down-bow:

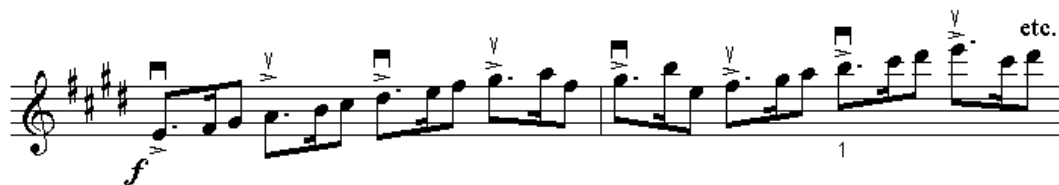
2 Then play the same rhythms starting on the second note of the passage, up-bow:

3 Combine the long-short and short-long patterns into four-note groups:

Play the passage starting on the first note (down-bow), the second note (up-bow), the third note (down-bow), and the fourth note (up-bow).

Basic three-note pattern:

1 Play the rhythm starting on the first note of the passage, down-bow:



2 Starting on the second note of the passage, up-bow:



3 Starting on the third note of the passage, down-bow:



It is easy to keep track of three-note rhythms when there are 3, 6, 9 or 12 notes in a bar. Whatever note in a bar you begin on - the first, second or third - the same note in each bar will be the first of a group of three notes.

When there are 16 notes in a bar it can be confusing, but every fourth bar you arrive 'home' with a group starting on the same note in the bar as the one you began on. Starting on the first note of the bar, the **first** note of the first bar, the **third** note of the second bar, the **second** note of the third bar will be the beginning of a group. The order is 1, 3, 2, 1, 3, 2, etc. Starting on the second note the order is 2, 1, 3, 2, 1, 3 etc. Starting on the third note the order is 3, 2, 1, 3, 2, 1 etc.



Basic four-note pattern:



Begin four-note patterns on the first, second, third and fourth notes of the bar.

Practising in rhythms has been advocated by many great players and teachers through the century. Galamian possibly took it as far as it could go in his scale book, giving dozens of different bowing and rhythm patterns to apply to scales. For general practice purposes it is not necessary to go to such extremes. Basic two-note ('long-short' and 'short-long') three-note and four-note dotted rhythm patterns are usually all that are necessary. Practising in rhythms produces astounding results. Try it for yourself and see.

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Next month's BASICS looks at some essential aspects of the bow.